

1 Steven H. Winterbauer, WSBA #16468  
2 Nate Bailey, WSBA #40756  
3 Winterbauer & Diamond PLLC  
4 1200 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1700  
5 Seattle, WA 98101  
6 (206) 676-8440  
7 mail@winterbauerdiamond.com

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12 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
13 EASTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON

14 WAYNE R. BLACK,

15 Plaintiff,

16 No. 2:17-cv-00365-RMP

17 v.  
18 GRANT COUNTY PUBLIC  
19 UTILITY DISTRICT; CHRIS  
20 HEIMBIGNER,

21 Defendants.

DEFENDANTS' ANSWER TO  
COMPLAINT

22 I. ANSWER

23 In Answer to the Complaint (“Complaint”) filed by Plaintiff Wayne  
24 R. Black (“Plaintiff”), Defendants Public Utility District No. 2 of Grant  
25 County (d/b/a Grant County Public Utility District) (the “District”) and  
26 Chris Heimbigner (collectively, “Defendants”) answer as follows:

27 1. Admit that Plaintiff is a 59-year-old citizen of the State of  
28 Washington and a resident of Grant County Washington, and are without  
29 sufficient information to admit or deny the remaining allegations in  
30 paragraph 1 and, therefore, deny them.

1           2. Admit that Defendant Heimbigner is employed by the District  
2 as the Line Superintendent and is a citizen of the State of Washington, and  
3 deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 2.

4           3. Admit that the District is a municipal corporation that is subject  
5 to regulation by the State of Washington and headquartered at 30 C St SW,  
6 Ephrata, WA 98823, and deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 3.

7           4. Admit the allegations in paragraph 4.

8           5. Admit the allegations in paragraph 5.

9           6. Admit and deny the allegations re-alleged in paragraph 6 as set  
10 forth above.

11          7. Admit that the District received a notice-of-claim letter from  
12 Plaintiff's attorney on or about April 4, 2017; deny the District did nothing  
13 other than sign for the letter; and are without sufficient information to admit  
14 or deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 7 and, therefore, deny them.

15          8. Admit that the District received a copy of a Right to Sue letter  
16 from the EEOC dated July 31, 2017 and addressed to Plaintiff; and are  
17 without sufficient information to admit or deny the remaining allegations in  
18 paragraph 8 and, therefore, deny them.

19          9. Admit the allegations in paragraph 9.

1           10. Are without sufficient information to admit or deny the  
2 allegations in paragraph 10 and, therefore, deny them.

3           11. Admit that Plaintiff periodically received Employee  
4 Recognition awards from the District; affirmatively state that Plaintiff's  
5 personnel file speaks for itself; and are without sufficient information to  
6 admit or deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 11 and, therefore, deny  
7 them.

8           12. Admit that Plaintiff placed first in the District's 2017 Pole Top  
9 Rescue competition, competed in the 2017 state competition, earned the  
10 privilege of attending and participating in the 2017 Kansas City International  
11 Lineman Rodeo as a judge, and earned the privilege of participating in the  
12 Kansas City International Lineman Rodeo on two other occasions; and are  
13 without sufficient information to admit or deny the remaining allegations in  
14 paragraph 12 and, therefore, deny them.

15          13. Admit that Plaintiff was awarded the bid for the Anticipated  
16 Temporary Line Crew Foreman effective March 12, 2012, and was awarded  
17 the bid for Line Crew Foreman effective July 5, 2013, and deny the  
18 remaining allegations in paragraph 13.

19          14. Admit the allegations in paragraph 14.

15. Admit that the District utilizes a bid process in relation to certain positions, that certain positions require specific qualifications, and that the District generally has the discretion to make selections among candidates, and deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 15.

16. Admit that the District has a Discipline & Corrective Action Policy, which document speaks for itself; and deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 16.

17. Admit that in September 2016, Plaintiff bid for a Supervising Foreman position that became open upon the former Supervising Foreman's retirement; that the Collective Bargaining Agreement ("CBA") governs the bidding process for the Supervising Foreman position, and speaks for itself; that the District received bids for the Supervising Foreman position from two candidates with at least three years of experience as a foreman, both of whom were over 40 years of age and one of whom was Plaintiff; are without sufficient information to admit or deny that both candidates with more than three years of experience as foremen were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and, therefore, deny it; and deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 17.

18. Admit that Plaintiff was demoted effective October 7, 2016, and deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 18.

1       19. Admit that the District selected a candidate for the Supervising  
2 Foreman position who was under 40 years of age and did not have three  
3 years of experience as a foreman; are without sufficient information to admit  
4 or deny that the successful candidate was not a member of the Church of  
5 Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and, therefore, deny it; and deny the  
6 remaining allegations in paragraph 19.

7       20. Admit that the selected Supervising Foreman candidate  
8 currently participates as commissioner of a fantasy football league during his  
9 personal, non-work time, and deny the remaining allegations in paragraph  
10 20.

11       21. Admit that Plaintiff was disciplined for his failure to follow  
12 instructions related to hanging clearance tags and for selling District  
13 property, and deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 21.

14       22. Admit that Plaintiff bid for a Dispatch Trainee position, which  
15 is subject to the District's right of selection; he was the most senior bidder;  
16 and he was not selected for an interview; and deny the remaining allegations  
17 in paragraph 22.

18       23. Admit that one of the individuals selected for the Dispatch  
19 Trainee position was a qualified lineman under 40 years of age and that the  
20  
21

other individual selected was a former HVAC employee; and deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 23.

24. Deny that Defendants have been malicious with intent to harm, discriminate against, or target Plaintiff based on any protected characteristic, and are without sufficient information to admit or deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 24 and, therefore, deny them.

## **II. CAUSES OF ACTION**

24. [sic] Admit and deny the allegations re-alleged in the second paragraph 24 as set forth above.

25. Admit the allegations in paragraph 25.

26. Admit that Defendant Heimbigner is an employee of the District and holds the position of Line Superintendent, and are without sufficient information to admit or deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 26 and, therefore, deny them.

27. Admit the allegations in paragraph 27.

28. Admit, on information and belief, that Plaintiff was the oldest bidder for the Dispatch Trainee position for which he applied, and deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 28.

29. Admit that Plaintiff was not selected for the Supervising Foreman position referenced above, and deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 29.

30. Deny the allegations in paragraph 30.

31. Deny the allegations in paragraph 31.

32. Deny the allegations in paragraph 32.

33. Deny the allegations in paragraph 33.

34. Deny the allegations in paragraph 34.

35. Admit that age is not a bona fide occupational qualification of  
the man position, and deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 35.

36. Deny the allegations in paragraph 36.

37. Deny the allegations in paragraph 37.

38. Admit and deny the allegations re-alleged in paragraph 38 as set above.

39. Admit the allegations in paragraph 39.

40. Admit that Defendant Heimbigner is an employee of the  
ct and holds the position of Line Superintendent, and are without  
ient information to admit or deny the remaining allegations in  
raph 40 and, therefore, deny them.

41. Are without sufficient information to admit or deny the allegations in paragraph 41 and, therefore, deny them.

42. Deny the allegations in paragraph 42.

43. Admit that Plaintiff was not selected for the Supervising Foreman position referenced above, and deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 43.

44. Deny the allegations in paragraph 44.

45. Deny the allegations in paragraph 45.

46. Deny the allegations in paragraph 46.

47. Deny the allegations in paragraph 47.

48. Deny the allegations in paragraph 48.

49. Admit that religious beliefs, affiliation, and practice are not bona fide occupational qualifications of any position at the District, and are without sufficient information to admit or deny the allegation regarding Plaintiff's status as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and, therefore, deny it, and deny the remaining allegations in paragraph 49.

50. Deny the allegations in paragraph 50.

51. Deny the allegations in paragraph 51.

### **III. PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

Defendants deny that Plaintiff is entitled to any of the relief set forth in the Prayer for Relief, specifically including without limitation the allegations in paragraphs 1 through 5.

#### **IV. DEFENSES AND AFFIRMATIVE DEFENSES**

By way of further answer, Defendants state the following defenses and affirmative defenses:

**1. Failure to state a claim.** The Complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.

**2. Legitimate non-discriminatory reasons.** Defendants undertook all actions challenged by Plaintiff for legitimate, non-discriminatory reasons.

3.       **Failure to Exhaust.** Plaintiff's employment is governed by a CBA, which includes mechanisms for reporting and grieving allegations of conduct violating the CBA, and Plaintiff failed to fully exhaust the grievance procedure under the CBA.

**4. Claims Exceed Scope of EEOC Charge.** To the extent that the Complaint purports to assert any claim or allegation under Title VII or the ADEA which was not the subject or within the scope of the individual

1 charge filed by Plaintiff with the EEOC, such claim is barred, in whole or in  
2 part, for failure to fulfill the prerequisites to suit under those statutes.

3       **5. Good Faith.** The District may not be held liable for punitive,  
4 exemplary and/or liquidated damage as it has undertaken a good faith effort  
5 to comply with all applicable federal statutes and has not acted with reckless  
6 indifference to Plaintiff's federally protected rights.

7       **6. Immunity.** Defendant Heimbigner is immune from civil  
8 liability under RCW 54.12.110 as all actions were in the good faith  
9 performance of acts within the scope of his official duties involving the  
10 exercise of judgment and discretion which related solely to his  
11 responsibilities for electrical utilities.

12       **7. Reservation.** The District reserves the right to assert additional  
13 defenses and affirmative defenses to conform with the proof as discovery  
14 progresses

15                   **V. DEFENDANTS' PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

16 WHEREFORE, having fully answered the Complaint, Defendants'  
17 respectfully request that:

- 18       1. The Complaint be dismissed with prejudice;  
19       2. Defendants be awarded the costs, disbursements and attorneys'  
20 fees they incur herein;

3. Defendants be granted permission to amend the Answer to conform with the proof; and

4. Defendants be granted such other relief as this Court deems just and equitable.

DATED this 18th day of December, 2017.

# WINTERBAUER & DIAMOND PLLC

s/ Nate Bailey

Steven H. Winterbauer, WSBA #16468  
Nate Bailey, WSBA #40756  
Attorney for Defendants  
Public Utility District No. 2 of Grant County  
and Chris Heimbigner

1                   **IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**  
2                   **FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON**

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I hereby certify that on December 18, 2017, I electronically filed the  
foregoing with the Clerk of the Court using the CM/ECF system which will  
send notification of such filing to the following:

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Ryan T. Earl  
Earl Law Group PLLC  
1334 S Pioneer Way  
Moses Lake, WA 98837  
Email: ryantearlattorneyatlaw@yahoo.com

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s/ Adam Love  
Adam Love  
Legal Assistant  
WINTERBAUER & DIAMOND PLLC  
1200 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1700  
Seattle, Washington 98101  
Phone: 206-676-8440  
Fax: 206-676-8441  
mail@winterbauerdiamond.com